

Message Text

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ORIGIN INR-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 EA-11 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 IO-14 /125 R

DRAFTED BY INR/REA/SA: DTKENNEY; WAROY

APPROVED BY INR/REA: WCHAMILTON

EA/VN :FINNEY (DRAFT)

EA/TB: TOMSETH (INFO)

----- 021960

R 042359Z JUN 74

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

INFO AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 117744

TAGS: PFOR, TH, VN

SUBJECT: NORTH VIETNAMESE DIPLOMATIC MANEUVERS WITH REGARD
TO THAILAND

REF: BANGKOK'S 7833; SAIGON 6436 (NOTAL)

FOLLOWING IS INR COMMENTARY:

1. WE BELIEVE THAT RECENT NORTH VIETNAMESE STATEMENTS ABOUT DRV-THAI RELATIONS REFLECT SOMEWHAT MORE MODERATE LANGUAGE IN TALKING ABOUT THE SANYA GOVERNMENT THAN HIS PREDECESSORS' AND SUGGEST HANOI MAY BE INTERESTED IN PROBING THAI RECEPTIVITY TO PLACING RESTRICTIONS ON THE U.S. USE OF BASES IN THAILAND.

2. THE MAY 12 NHAN DAN COMMENTARY--BY "OBSERVER"--WAS THE FIRST AUTHORITATIVE HANOI RESPONSE TO THE NOW YEAR-OLD THAI INITIATIVE WITH REGARD TO DRV RELATIONS WITH THAILAND. INCREASED DRV PRESS COVERAGE OF THIS SUBJECT IN RECENT
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WEEKS SUGGESTS FURTHER THAT THE ISSUE OF THAI-DRV RELATIONS,

INCLUDING THE KEY PROBLEM OF THE U.S. PRESENCE ON THAI BASES, IS RECEIVING SOMEWHAT MORE ATTENTION IN HANOI. THE MAY 12 COMMENTARY OFFERED THE MOST EXPLICIT DISCUSSION OF THE LINKAGE--IN HANOI'S EYES--BETWEEN THE KEY ISSUES OF THE CONTINUING U.S. PRESENCE IN THAILAND AND ANY IMPROVEMENT IN DRV-RTG RELATIONS. WE NOTICE THAT SEVERAL THEMES IN THE NHAN DAN ARTICLE SEEM TO BE SURFACING MORE FREQUENTLY IN THE LAST SEVERAL WEEKS:

A----HANOI MAKES A CLEAR DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE FORMER SARIT AND THANOM-PRAPHAT "MILITARY JUNTA" WHICH IS DESCRIBED AS "US HENCHMEN" WHO PERPETRATED "COUNTLESS CRIMES AGAINST THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE" AND THE PRESENT SANYA GOVERNMENT WHICH HAS ISSUED "STATEMENTS WHICH SOUND DIFFERENT FROM THE REACTIONARY LINE OF THE FORMER ADMINISTRATION."

B)----HANOI TAKES WELCOME NOTE OF THE THAI GOVERNMENT'S DECLARATION OF SUPPORT FOR THE NEUTRALIZATION OF SOUTH-EAST ASIA, FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF US TROOPS FROM THAILAND AND FOR THE PULLING OUT OF THAI TROOPS FROM LAOS, BUT COMPLAINS THAT LITTLE PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE.

C)----HANOI INTRODUCES THE SUBJECT OF US BASES IN THAILAND IN THE ROUNDABOUT FORM OF A QUESTION--I.E., HOW CAN BANGKOK JUSTIFY THE LEASING OF THAI BASES TO THE US AND HOW CAN THERE BE ANY MEANINGFUL "NEUTRALIZATION" OF SOUTHEAST ASIA AND "FRIENDLY RELATIONS" BETWEEN THE RTG AND THE DRV SO LONG AS THE US USES THESE BASES "TO THREATEN THE INDEPENDENCE OF SOUTHEAST ASIA STATES."

D)----MOST IMPORTANT, HANOI AVOIDS MAKING A SPECIFIC DEMAND THAT THAILAND FORCE A US TROOP WITHDRAWAL AS A CONDITION FOR IMPROVED RTG-DRV RELATIONS; HANOI MERELY CALLS FOR AN END TO THAI "COLLUSION" WITH THE US AS ONE OF THREE CONDITIONS FOR IMPROVING RELATIONS. THE OTHER CONDITIONS APPEAR LESS SERIOUS--I.E., A CESSATION OF ANTI-DRV PROPAGANDA AND THE RELEASE OF ILLEGALLY DETAINED VIETNAMESE RESIDENTS.

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3. A SUCCINCT RESTATEMENT OF HOW HANOI CURRENTLY SEES THE LINKAGE BETWEEN THE US BASING PROBLEM AND IMPROVEMENT OF RELATIONS WITH THE RTG APPEARED IN THE DRV'S DIPLOMATIC NOTE OF MAY 30 TO SIGNATORY COUNTRIES OF THE 1962 GENEVA AGREEMENTS ON LAOS, WHICH AGAIN DREW AN INTERESTING DISTINCTION BETWEEN WHAT THE US AS OPPOSED TO THE RTG MUST DO IN ORDER TO BE IN COMPLIANCE WITH THOSE AGREEMENTS:

-----"THE UNITED STATES MUST IMMEDIATELY AND COMPLETELY WITHDRAW ITS MILITARY FORCES, DISMANTLE FORTHWITH ITS MILITARY BASES IN THAILAND, AND PUT AN END TO ITS MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN INDOCHINA AND IN THIS REGION; THE THAI ADMINISTRATION MUST NOT ALLOW THE UNITED STATES TO CONTINUE USING THAI TERRITORY FOR AGGRESSION AND INTERVENTION IN LAOS AND THE OTHER INDOCHINESE COUNTRIES."

(FBIS B 301627)

4. WHETHER OR HOW FAR HANOI WILL ULTIMATELY BE WILLING TO COMPROMISE ANY OF ITS BASIC DEMANDS REMAINS TO BE TESTED. PHAM VAN DONG'S STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF THE KHMER INSURGENT LEADER KHIEU SAMPHAN'S DINNER ON 29 MAY--CALLING FOR A COMPLETE WITHDRAWAL OF US FORCES AND THE END OF ALL US BASES IN THAILAND--INDICATES CONTINUED DRV SENSITIVITY ABOUT THE US PRESENCE IN THAILAND.

5. NEVERTHELESS, CONTINUED USE OF THE MORE REFINED LANGUAGE WOULD INDICATE A WILLINGNESS TO PROBE RTG FLEXIBILITY AND PERHAPS THE HOPE THAT BY EMPLOYING MORE AMBIGUOUS FORMULATIONS ABOUT KEY ISSUE STILL DIVIDING THE TWO COUNTRIES HANOI MAY BE ABLE TO INFLUENCE THAI POLICY:

A)-----HANOI APPEARS TO HOPE ITS LATEST LINE WILL STRENGTHEN THE HANDS OF THOSE, SUCH AS CHATCHAI AND THANAT, WHO HAVE BEEN ADVOCATES OF RAPID IMPROVEMENT IN THAI-NORTH VIETNAMESE RELATIONS.

B)-----HANOI APPEARS TO BE MOVING TO THE VIEW THAT ANY CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT IN BANGKOK WOULD HAVE GREAT DIFFI-

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CULTY OBTAINING THE BACKING OF THE THAI MILITARY FOR A POLICY AIMED AT FORCING THE US OUT OF THAILAND AND, THUS, THAT MORE LIMITED TEMPORARY ADJUSTMENTS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED.

C)-----HANOI MAY, THEN, BELIEVE THAT ITS LATEST LINE WILL ENCOURAGE THAI CONSIDERATION OF RESTRICTIONS ON US USE OF THAI BASES WHICH, IF IMPOSED, MIGHT LEAD TO A US DECISION TO WITHDRAW FROM THE BASES; SUCH A DECISION WOULD SATISFY A MAJOR NORTH VIETNAMESE GOAL AND ALLOW THE THAI GOVERNMENT TO PLACE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DECISION SQUARELY UPON THE US.

6. AT THE LEAST, HANOI MAY HOPE THAT ITS MODIFIED LINE WILL OPEN THE DOOR FOR FURTHER BEHIND-THE-SCENES DISCUS-

SIONS AND STIMULATE A STEPPED-UP PUBLIC AIRING IN THAILAND
OF THE WHOLE SUBJECT OF THAI-DRV RELATIONS. KISSINGER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: AMITY, FOREIGN RELATIONS, PRESS COMMENTS, POLICIES, INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION, MILITARY BASES, TROOP REDUCTIONS, NEUTRALISM
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 04 JUN 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: cunninfx
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974STATE117744
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: DTKENNEY; WAROY
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740142-0770
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740675/aaaacmxd.tel
Line Count: 171
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ORIGIN INR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: BANGKOK'S 7833; SAIGON 6436 (NOTAL)
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: cunninfx
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29 APR 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <29 APR 2002 by cunninfx>; APPROVED <19 FEB 2003 by cunninfx>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: NORTH VIETNAMESE DIPLOMATIC MANEUVERS WITH REGARD TO THAILAND
TAGS: PFOR, TH, VN
To: BANGKOK
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005